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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2009

In Today's Papers

President Gul Backtracks on His Use of the Word "Kurdistan"
All papers and TV Channels: Speaking to reporters at the airport in Ankara upon his return from a two-day visit to Iraq, President Gul denied that he referred to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq as "Kurdistan." Gul told reporters, "There is a local Kurdish Administration in northern Iraq which was established by the constitution of Iraq. This is what I said. I met with the prime minister of the local Kurdish Administration; such talks are very normal. At a time when the fight against terror is being conducted and difficult issues are faced, it is meaningless to go into unnecessary arguments. Every country has its own languages, terminology, laws and constitutions. The Iraqis decided on their territorial integrity, political unity and their own style of administration." Gul added that as a neighbor, Turkey extended full support to Iraq's reconstruction.

Mainstream Hurriyet and mainstream Haberturk reports that all the journalists accompanying Gul in his visit to Baghdad mentioned in their reporting that President Gul used the word "Kurdistan."

Meeting Held Between President Gul and KRG Prime Minister Necirvan Barzani
Yeni Safak, Zaman, Turkiye, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, and others: Liberal Radikal and mainstream Sabah report that President Gul also met with KRG Prime Minister Necirvan Barzani. Gul said, "Necirvan Barzani reaffirmed their determination to fight against the PKK. Turkey appreciates this. But we cannot wait for the results forever." Responding to a question regarding a declaration of amnesty for the PKK, Gul stressed that "the declaration of amnesty is Turkey's internal issue" and he would not discuss it with others. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek said, "There are no plans to declare amnesty for PKK terrorists but in Turkish laws there were already regulations granting amnesty to repentant terrorists."

Meanwhile, Sabah reports that the PKK again rejected Iraqi President Talabani's call to the PKK to disarm or leave Iraq by saying, "Talabani does not represent the PKK."

Editorial Commentary on Turkey-Iraq Relations, Gul's Use of the Word "Kurdistan"

Oktay Eksi wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "The Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG) is a reality, as stated in Iraqi constitution. However we, Turkey, have to use this term correctly when the time comes. Now is not the right time because it looks as if Turkey is part of the big plan to politicize the PKK. We should also argue about the sincerity of Iraqi Kurds regarding their words and the deeds. Turkey has sent 5 diplomatic notes for action against the PKK so far, but Baghdad did not even respond to any of them."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The president's pronunciation of 'Kurdistan' is an effort to create better ties with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and KRG President Massoud Barzani in order to dissolve the PKK. However, Ankara should proceed with caution by bearing in mind the larger picture. It is nice to believe that the PKK will eventually be forced to disarm, but terrorist organizations never take such big steps without bargaining for political gains. When we think about the ultimate goal of the Kurds of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq --i.e. independent Kurdistan-- it is obvious why we must act with caution."

Fehmi Kuru wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "The president has made a historic visit to Iraq and it should not be wasted by focusing on his use of the words 'Kurdistan' and 'amnesty.' There is a positive spirit in the Iraqi side and we should be supportive to this approach."

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Yasemin Congar wrote in leftist Taraf: "President Gul has done the right thing by saying to Necirvan Barzani that amnesty [for PKK members] is Turkey's internal matter. On the other hand, Turkey has to be proactive on this very Turkish matter and should be able to set the proper legal ground for the upcoming Kurdish conference in Erbil."

Goldman Sachs Report on Post-Elections Turkey
Mainstream Vatan carries the results of a report prepared by Goldman Sachs on the March 29 municipal elections in Turkey. The report lists the ruling AKP's advantages over other political parties as "Prime Minister Erdogan's charisma and exceptional leadership talents," the success of the AKP in uniting Islamic and nationalistic tones in conservative voters, and the "organizational" success of the AKP. In Turkey, 65 percent of the votes go to the conservative/right wing parties and politics, embodied today in the AKP. The AKP is represented even in the tiny villages across Anatolia and has a dynamic party organization, says the report.

The report predicts in the post-municipal elections period that, should the AKP receive 40-45 percent of the votes, markets will react positively, opening the way for a new deal with the IMF. If the AKP wins below 35 percent of the votes, coupled with continued stagnation, Turkey may call early elections in 2010. If the AKP receives over 50 percent of the votes, it may pose some "risks" for the ruling party such as boosting confidence for making "controversial" reforms, according to the report.

Former TGS Chief: Young Generation in Turkish Military More Democratic

Media outlets report that on Wednesday, prosecutors in the 'Ergenekon' case said the former chief of the military general staff (TGS,) retired general Hilmi Ozkok may be invited to testify in the ongoing case. Ozkok has earlier said he would make a deposition if the prosecutors ask him to do so. Ozkok was the chief of the Turkish military from 2002-2006.

Papers report Ozkok told daily Milliyet on Tuesday that the young generation in the military "thinks differently, receives a good education, and are more democratic." In addition, Ozkok said, "Knowledge of a foreign language enables them to closely follow the developments around the world," adding that serving in NATO "broadens the horizons" of military officers. Ozkok said military takeovers were closely related to a country's level of development.

"Countries that have developed in economic and social terms do not face military coups." Citing the "Transformation Command" within NATO as an example, Ozkok said scientific studies that help people "learn from the past" was another important factor in preventing military takeovers.

Turkey Lends a Hand on the Topic of Afghanistan

Media outlets note Turkish officials are exerting efforts to contribute to a more peaceful Afghanistan by hosting an upcoming summit between Afghan President Karzai and Pakistani President Zerdari. Conservative-nationalist Turkiye reports, "At the beginning of April, a trilateral summit will be held in Ankara between Turkey, Pakistan, and Afghanistan," in order to "strengthen cooperation." Liberal Radikal reports, "Turkey is exerting efforts in order to keep the neighboring countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan from fighting each other over Islamist militant elements such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports, "The Trilateral Summit Will Take Place in Turkey Within A Week's Time," and "Turkey will bring together the Pakistani President and the Afghan President for the fourth time," so "Turkey can mediate between the two countries prior to the NATO summit." Cumhuriyet also notes that U.S. Envoy for South Asia Richard Holbrooke "Wants Broad Support" from NATO and EU officials regarding "the White House's new strategy to provide more support to Afghanistan through aid and training."

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In a related story, Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "Even Reuters is saying Turkey can help the U.S. in the Middle East," and "Before Obama takes a step forward with Iran he will consult with Turkey."

An 'Extremist Cabinet' in Israel (Yeni Safak)

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports "A coalition is formed between the extreme right and the extreme left." Far right Ortadogu reports, "After lengthy talks Netanyahu has reached an agreement with Labor Party Leader Ehud Barak and they are making preparations for a coalition." Mainstream Milliyet reports "The Right and the Left Reach a Coalition in Israel."

Rasmussen Still Not the Man for The Job of NATO Chief

Mainstream Hurriyet reports Deputy Prime Minister Suat Kiniklioglu said, "It's unacceptable to put someone who is disrespectful to our religious beliefs and sacred values in charge of NATO," and "its particularly unacceptable at this moment because the U.S. president is putting such emphasis on Afghanistan" and Rasmussen is not the person to show "respect for religion" for Muslims in Afghanistan at this time.

Speculations Continue Regarding Obama Visit

Mainstream Hurriyet reports on its front page, "Michelle Obama is not coming to Turkey so she can be with her children." In addition, Hurriyet cites anonymous U.S. officials as saying "Turkey will not be the venue for Obama's address to the Muslim world," and "Obama will meet with opposition political leaders in addition to the ruling party so he does not come across as favoring the ruling party in Turkey."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- Cumhuriyet newspaper's Ankara bureau chief and columnist Mustafa Balbay, currently under arrest in the 'Ergenekon' investigation, claimed his diaries "were altered in order to strengthen the slander campaign" against him. The diaries attributed to Balbay include notes of meetings with top military officials for toppling the government.

- Ahead of the March 29 municipal elections, the state-owned Ziraat Bank has announced a 10 billion Lira "Spring Package" that brings easy payments and interest rate cuts for its 6 million customers.

- Industry Minister Zafer Caglayan said about the "soaring" car sales following a recent cut on private consumption tax, "It was not a huge cut, but people, in herd mentality, began buying cars."

- Gypsies forcibly evicted from their homes in Istanbul's Sulukule district now have been evicted from the new homes after they failed to pay for their new houses.

World

- The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calls on Turkey and Greece to respect European standards in the treatment of minorities.

- Foreign Minister Ali Babacan will join the March 27 Shanghai Cooperation Organization's "Afghanistan special meeting" in Moscow.

- Reconciliation talks between the rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah will resume in Egypt on April 1.

- Al-Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, urged the Sudanese people to prepare for a "long guerrilla war" following the ICC's charging President Omar al-Bashir with war crimes.

JEFFREY